

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in Boston,
Massachusetts**

April 1, 2010

The President. Hello, Boston. It's good to be back. Good to be back in Beantown.

Audience member. We love you, President Obama!

The President. I love you back.

Audience member. Keep smiling! [*Laughter*]

The President. I can't help it. [*Laughter*] There are a couple people I want to make sure I acknowledge: our Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray is in the house. I believe a sizable portion of the Massachusetts congressional delegation is here. Please wave. Where are they? I see—who do I got? Markey, Capuano—who else we got here? Delahunt is over here. Love these guys. [*Laughter*]

One of the finest mayors in the country, Tom Menino is in the house. Senator Paul Kirk is here. My dear friend, Vicki Kennedy, is here.

Somebody else who's inspired me—some of you know that the Democrats, when we came in, we decided we'd try to advance this novel concept—and that is that women should get the same pay as men for doing the same work. The bill that we signed was called the Lilly Ledbetter bill because Lilly Ledbetter, through her court case, inspired an entire nation to say that the Supreme Court wasn't right and we needed to do something about it. And Lilly Ledbetter is here. I want everybody to give her a big round of applause.

Now, it's a hard thing being a Governor. It's a hard thing being a Governor and the chairman of the Democratic National Committee. And over the last year, this guy has done it with the grace and the stick-to-it-iveness that has marked his entire career. He's one of my dearest friends, the first person to endorse me outside of Illinois, standing in the seat of the old Confederacy in February of 2007, my dear friend Tim Kaine. I should point out that he was term limited. He only had one term to serve, so he was willing to do something crazy like endorse me that quick. [*Laughter*]

And then let me thank Deval for the extraordinary introduction. And before I begin, I want to say a few words about the record flooding that's been sweeping across a large portion of New England. I stopped by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency with Deval earlier today to be briefed on relief and recovery efforts, and I want everybody to know that we are working closely, minute by minute, with authorities in both States to provide the necessary assistance.

And I want to thank personally local and State first-responders who've been working tirelessly and under difficult circumstances to save lives and property. I want to thank our team at FEMA that is fully engaged and committed to working with affected communities not only in terms of response efforts, but also in terms of rebuilding efforts. And tomorrow Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and FEMA Director—or FEMA Deputy Administrator Rich Serino, who is a Boston native, by the way——

Audience member. Woo! [*Laughter*]

The President. —will be visiting Rhode Island to tour some of the hardest hit areas and make sure that we are doing everything we can.

Audience member. Thank you!

The President. You are welcome, but thank them. And all of our thoughts and prayers are with the families who've been dislocated and are wrestling with this enormous tragedy.

It is worth reminding people at a time when folks who work in Government don't get enough credit that when times are tough, when trouble arises, there are all kinds of civil servants out there who are working 24/7 in order to help folks. And I think it's worth remembering that when you hear some of the rhetoric out there.

Now, it's good to be back in a town that's been so good to me. People forget I once spent 3 years cooped up in a library across the river. [*Laughter*] I still managed to make some good memories though. A few years ago, I gave this speech down at the convention speech that went pretty good. [*Laughter*] Most of you didn't know my name before that. But one man who did is a man who wakes up every single day determined to fight the good fight for Massachusetts families and Massachusetts's future, and that's your Governor, and my dear friend, Deval Patrick.

Deval stood up for me when I was running for the United States Senate that year. Then, right after I took office, he came to me; I had just set up my office at the Hart Building. Deval is saying this is a true story; this is a true story. [*Laughter*] He says "Barack, congratulations. We're so proud of you. I've got this idea. I've got this feeling that the people of Massachusetts might be looking for something a little bit different, and so I've got this hunger to serve. I want to run for Governor." And I thought to myself, "Well, this guy is crazy." [*Laughter*] "He's not going to win. He's never run for anything." At the time there were these candidates who had been planning the race for years. But then I thought to myself, "Well, yes, but he supported me when I was doing this stupid thing running for the United States Senate, so—and I like him, so, what the heck." [*Laughter*]

He had already put himself out there for one hopeless cause, I figured the least I could do was to return the favor. But the reason that I did it happily was because I knew there was a core decency and integrity about Deval. I knew that this was a man who does the right thing, who has a vision for the future, somebody who was going to be tenacious in his pursuit of that vision. And even though he didn't have any money or big-name support, as soon as he started getting organized, I said to myself, "He's going to win."

And I watched him travel across this Commonwealth, listening to you and building his campaign house by house, block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, and that confidence spread to others. And folks began to say, "You know, this guy Patrick, he's not Irish." [*Laughter*] "But we like him anyway." [*Laughter*] I mean, it was a good trick. Initially, people would come—[*laughter*]—and then when it was too late to—they listened to him and—[*laughter*]. I did the same thing. [*Laughter*] I put an apostrophe after the "O"—[*laughter*]—and it worked out pretty good.

But the reason it worked was because Deval knew that the campaign wasn't about him, it was about you. His core vision was that everyone in this Commonwealth had a part to play in building its future, and so many of you built a movement for change that could not be denied.

So I want you to realize that you've got a tremendous leader in Deval Patrick. In what is an extraordinarily tough time to be a Governor, he has moved forward, not on the easy issues,

but on the tough issues: pushing historic ethics reform, making education a top priority, keeping Massachusetts at the forefront of clean technology and biotechnology and all the innovations that are ultimately going to determine how well America is able to compete around the world in the 21st century. He's the Governor that's going to keep leading Massachusetts into the future.

And here's what else I want you to remember, Boston. The campaign Deval Patrick built is the same campaign for change that you and I built across this country, same way: house by house, block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood. Because we shared a simple belief: Change does not come from the top down; change comes from the bottom up. It comes from Americans like you. That's what this movement has been about.

You believed that government of the people and by the people could still work for the people. You believed that we could still stand up to the special interests by standing up for middle class interests. You believed that we should finally solve the problems that had been holding back our families and our businesses year after year after year. You believed that it was still possible to change the United States of America for the better. And Boston, I've come to tell you tonight that we have kept faith with those beliefs. We have begun to solve those problems. The change you fought for is beginning to take hold.

Now, we knew from the beginning that it wouldn't be easy. Change never is. President Kennedy once said: "When we got into office, the thing that surprised me most was that things were as bad as we'd been saying they were." [Laughter] Right, Deval?

Governor Deval L. Patrick of Massachusetts. That's right. [Laughter]

The President. So when we took office, we faced a financial crisis unseen since the 1930s, economy bleeding 750,000 jobs a month, a \$1.3 trillion deficit, and two wars that were costly in every sense of the word.

So priority number one was responding to this incredible economic crisis. And by the way, some of the short-term steps required to do that weren't popular and they weren't easy. The pundits in Washington kept on saying, "What's he doing shoring up the banks and the auto industry and passing a Recovery Act? Doesn't he know it's unpopular? Doesn't he know it will make him vulnerable?"

Well, yes, it turns out I've got pollsters too. [Laughter] We usually know what's going to be unpopular before the newspapers do. [Laughter] But I also knew that if you govern by pundits and polls, then you lose sight of why you got into public service in the first place. You lose sight of why all of you fought so hard to put me there in the first place. And I refuse to govern that way. That's not why we fought so hard to win office.

My job is to solve problems for the people who elected me to solve them and for the people who didn't. [Laughter] My job wasn't to husband my popularity, make sure that I'm not making waves. That's how a lot of folks who get into office govern. It's easy. But that's part of the reason why we've seen so little progress on the things that matter so much to ordinary people.

So I resolved to do not necessarily what was popular, but what I thought was right. And a year later, the financial system has stabilized. I love, you know, in the midst of the crisis—you guys may remember last March, when the stock market was bottoming out—"This is Obama's stock market." [Laughter] Wall Street Journal said that, "Oh, look at his policies." And I notice

it's not my market anymore. [Laughter] I don't know what happened. You notice that?
[Laughter]

We recovered most of the money it took to stabilize the financial markets. And I've proposed a fee on the biggest banks to recover every last dime that's still out there, so we are going to make sure that taxpayers get all their money back. A year later, GM is hiring again, on the verge of reopening hundreds of dealerships. A year later, the Recovery Act has put Americans back to work across the country rebuilding our infrastructure, provided nearly \$300 billion in tax cuts designed to help small businesses and 95 percent of working Americans, and that's a major reason why the economy that was shrinking a year ago is growing today. Taking those steps was the right thing to do.

Now, think back to just 2 months ago. Everybody thought our chances at progress were suddenly doomed. A Republican had won Ted Kennedy's seat.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Massachusetts, you caused quite a bit of excitement around the country. [Laughter] The sky was falling. You remember that? I'm sure none of you felt that way. [Laughter]

But we did what our friend Teddy would have done. We kept up the fight, because it was the right thing to do. And because we did, and because of the Members of Congress who are here today, last week we proved that America is a better nation than one that allows illness or accident to endanger the dreams of its people, people who have worked a lifetime to build those dreams. We finally passed comprehensive health insurance reform in America. After a hundred years, we passed health insurance reform and enshrined the idea that everybody should have some security when it comes to their health care. Nobody should be bankrupt when they get sick. No child should languish because of lack of care. After a hundred years.

As Joe Biden said, who has a way with words, this is—[laughter]—what? [Laughter] He said it's a big deal. [Laughter] This reform will begin to end the worst practices of the insurance industry. They're going to rein in our exploding deficits, and over time, finally offer millions of families and small-business owners quality, affordable care and the security and peace of mind that comes with it, some of those folks for the very first time in their lives. And what it doesn't do is it doesn't hand more control to the Government or to health insurance companies; it gives it back to you, the American people.

And then this week, we built on that progress. I signed into law a bill that will finally reform the student loan system so that it works for students and families instead of bankers. We took \$68 billion—\$68 billion—that would have been going to financial middlemen to pad their profits, even though they weren't taking any risks—because these were all federally guaranteed loans—and we said, why don't we use that to make college more affordable and to strengthen our community colleges, which are a pathway for so many working families to success. Because that's how we'll achieve the goal that I've set: By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

And so we're able to say to college students today that we have doubled Pell grants, and we are going to make sure that you never have to pay more than 10 percent of your income for your college debt, because we don't want you being hampered as you get started in life. And if you go into a job like teaching we will forgive your loans after 10 years. That's an agenda for moving America forward.

And then next week, I'll travel to Prague, where the United States of America and Russia will sign the most comprehensive arms control agreement in nearly 20 years, part of our effort to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and seek a world without them.

So these are some of the recent successes that you made possible. But some of our other successes happened so quick, everybody's forgotten about them. *[Laughter]* I mean, people don't realize we made the largest investment in clean energy in history. Folks don't realize that we made this huge investment in information technologies for the health care system, so that you don't have to fill out as many forms when you go to the doctor and we can all start saving some money and saving some time. Folks don't realize that we put the law behind the principle of equal pay for an equal day's work. We passed laws to protect consumers from getting ripped off by credit card companies and homeowners from being taken advantage of by predatory lenders and our children being targeted from big tobacco. And we appointed Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court. And we made the White House the people's house again. And we passed a service bill named for Senator Ted Kennedy that's giving young and old a chance to serve their country and give back to their communities.

Audience member. What's next? *[Laughter]*

The President. I'm telling you. *[Laughter]* You sound like the reporters. *[Laughter]*

I was up in Maine, and I was joking about—only slightly joking—about the fact that the day after we signed it, everybody started writing these stories about how the country is still divided on health care, it hasn't suddenly become universally popular. *[Laughter]* What's going on? It's been a week, folks. *[Laughter]*

So I said, can you imagine if, you know, the pundits and the cable guys were covering a farm? *[Laughter]* And you know, you sort of till the soil and, look, the soil is all messed up. *[Laughter]* And then you put the seeds in, and the next day they'd write a story: "Nothing is growing." *[Laughter]* "We're going to starve. There are no crops." *[Laughter]* "It's polling really badly." *[Laughter]*

Here's the point—*[laughter]*—I'm starting to have fun, which I should not do—in ways large and small, Boston, we've begun to deliver on the change you believed in. We have done what we said we would do.

That's the other thing that surprises folks in Washington. They said, "Well, you know, why did you keep on doing health care?" Well, because I said—that's what I said I was going to do. *[Laughter]*

What our recent debates have lain bare is that even though we've had some success overcoming political gridlock, we haven't had as much success in changing political gridlock. We have to admit that. And I wanted to change the tone in Washington; it hasn't changed, not yet. But I still believe that if we're going to deal with the great challenges of our time and secure a better future, as past generations of Americans have done, as they did for us, then we're going to have to change our politics, because for all our efforts, change can't come fast enough for so many Americans.

Every time I visit workers in a factory or families in a diner, every night when I sit down and I read letters from everyday Americans, I get the same questions. People ask, "How am I going to find a job? I'm 50 years old. I've known only one skill my entire life, and now I've been laid off. Where do I turn?" Or, "How am I going to retire when I keep spending the savings I—all my savings just to get by, just to pay skyrocketing health care bills?" Or, "How am I going to

make it when I'm stretched to the limit on my mortgage and my bills and I'm trying to save for my kids' college education?"

You know, they're not asking me, "Barack, which party is scoring more political points? Who's ahead at the polls? Who won the news cycle today?" They look to Washington, and they see a city that's just obsessed with red versus blue and who's up and who's down and every day is election day. Every day is election day. There are stories out right now—"We've polled Obama in 2012." [Laughter] I'm not joking. I mean, people write entire columns—"Well, you know, matched up against hypothetical Republicans, here's what happening"—less concerned about what's going on in the life of folks in America.

And it's no wonder there's so much frustration out there. And yes, some of it is going to be directed at us because, you know what, one of the things you sign up for when you become a Governor or you become a President is that you're a lightning rod for all these frustrations that build up, legitimate frustrations.

Now, there are always going to be some issues where Democrats and Republicans just don't see eye to eye. That's how our democracy works. It's supposed to be messy. It was designed that way. But it's one thing to disagree out of principle; it's another way to stand—it's another thing to stand in the way just because it's politically expedient. And I don't know how else to describe one of the Republican Senators saying that health care was going to be "Obama's Waterloo." You remember that?

Audience members. Yes.

The President. That's the kind of politics that says, "When you lose, I win," regardless of what it means for the country. And that's an unfortunate approach, especially when this new law has a lot of Republicans in it—or a lot of Republican ideas in it. You know, you've got a former Governor of Massachusetts who's running around—[laughter]—saying, "What's this health reform bill?" [Laughter] And I keep on scratching my head and I say, boy, this Massachusetts thing, who designed that? [Laughter] And I have to say, already you're starting to see some Republicans that are actually claiming credit for some of the ideas in the bill, even though they fought against the bill.

And part of this was a early calculated decision made by Republican leaders in Congress not to work with us on the most important issues facing the American people. And they made this decision even before I was sworn into office. The general strategy was if they could block progress on any big issue, then they could say that the Democrats had failed and they could run on that in November. That's not just short-term politics, that's short-term thinking. And it's especially disappointing in a time of crisis when there's so much work to be done.

Well, it turns out health reform wasn't my Waterloo. [Laughter] And it turns out that the day after I signed the bill it wasn't Armageddon. [Laughter] No asteroids fell. [Laughter] The Earth didn't crack open. Nobody has lost their doctor. Nobody has been manacled and dragged into a Government plan. We're going to be okay. [Laughter] We're going to be better than okay. Because in the end, it was a long-overdue victory for the American people, and it's a step, like everything that we've done over the past year, to help restore some certainty and security to middle class families that have felt that security slipping away. And we're going to keep on fighting on those other challenges that we face.

So, my friend back there, whoever it was, asked me what was next. Let me tell you. [Laughter] Folks can keep on calling me naive if they want. I've been called that before. I'm going to keep on reaching out to Republicans for their help.

Audience member. Don't bother! [*Laughter*]

The President. It may be heresy to say so at an event like this, I know—[*laughter*—but I believe that those of us in public life have to care less about what's right for a party and more about what's right for the country. So I'm going to keep incorporating their ideas, even if they refuse to consider mine. Maybe we can even get your newest Senator on board with some of our efforts, because there's a lot we should be able to agree on.

We should all agree that we have to rebuild this economy so that hard work is once again rewarded and families feel like they've got a shot at the American Dream again. This isn't just an economic challenge for our country. It's a crisis that tears at our society's soul, because a job is more than just a paycheck. It's about feeling that sense of self-worth from a job well done, the fulfillment in meeting one's responsibilities. No American should be deprived of that dignity. And so we've going to have to think creatively and collaboratively if we're going to put Americans back to work.

We should all agree we have to pursue a comprehensive strategy for energy security that moves us from fossil fuels and foreign oil to homegrown fuels and clean energy, because the nation that leads in the clean energy sector will lead the economy in the 21st century.

We should all agree that we've got to pass commonsense rules for Wall Street to prevent the kind of nonsense that took place and helped to lead to this crisis, where a few reckless financial institutions can bring down an entire economy and burst the dreams of millions of American families.

We should all agree that we've got to bring down our mounting deficits, which is why I signed into law PAYGO rules—very simple concept, you pay as you go—that helped produce the budget surpluses of the 1990s. And that's why I ordered a freeze on discretionary spending and have created a bipartisan, independent commission to help solve our fiscal crisis, because we face some tough choices ahead, and we need to make them together. And they're not going to be made by slogans. They're going to be made by us coming together and deciding to do right by the next generation.

I know we can do this. I know we can overcome the politics of cynicism and come together in common purpose to solve our greatest challenges. And I know this because of you. I was remarking to Deval, the first time I was in this room was after the New Hampshire primary. Some of you were here. You remember that? And as is true, once you're President—folks had gotten carried away on the upswing—all right?—so after Iowa, everybody had just gone crazy and "it's over" and this and that and the other. And then we lost New Hampshire, and suddenly, everybody was "ooh"—[*laughter*]. Everybody was sad. [*Laughter*] Well, not everybody; I mean the folks who were supporting me were sad. [*Laughter*]

And I remember coming to this room and—I don't know if some of you remember me saying this—I said, you know, I actually think this is a good thing. Because, I said, the race for the Presidency should not be easy; it should be hard; you should be tested. You should be poked and prodded and the American people should be able to lift the hood and take candidates out for a test drive and see whether they meet the test. And the process of running for President is so humbling, in part because what you come to realize is the American people are so good, and they're so decent, and they deserve the best possible leadership.

And so I remember speaking to all of you and said, cheer up, stand up. We're in the midst of this remarkable democratic experiment, and I didn't get involved in this because I was a sure thing. I got involved in this because I felt it was the right thing to do, and that maybe my voice

combined with your voice and voices of people all across the country could somehow make a meaningful difference.

And my faith is renewed every day by Americans that I meet all across this great country who refuse to settle for the status quo. My resolve is strengthened every time I see an American who rejects the idea that Americans can no longer do big things. I am fired up by every American who still believes that people who love their country can change it. And, Boston, we have seen what happens when we don't back down. We have seen what's happens when we don't quit. I don't quit; you don't quit. And I am absolutely confident, with your help, we will rise to our challenges. We will finish what we've started. We'll reelect Deval Patrick. We will keep the American Dream alive for this generation and for the next generation. You can bank on that.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:58 p.m. at the State Room. In his remarks, he referred to Victoria R. Kennedy, wife of former Sen. Edward M. Kennedy; Lilly Ledbetter, former employee, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company plant in Gadsden, AL; former Gov. Timothy M. Kaine of Virginia, chairman, Democratic National Committee; Sens. Scott P. Brown and Jim DeMint; and former Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee reception in Boston, MA.

Locations: Boston, MA.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Brown, Scott P.; Capuano, Michael E.; Delahunt, William D.; DeMint, Jim; Kaine, Timothy M.; Kennedy, Victoria R.; Kirk, Paul G., Jr.; Ledbetter, Lilly; Markey, Edward J. ; Menino, Thomas M.; Murray, Timothy P.; Napolitano, Janet A.; Patrick, Deval L.; Romney, Mitt; Serino, Richard A.; Sotomayor, Sonia.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Budget, Federal : Deficit; Budget, Federal : Deficit Reduction Commission; Budget, Federal : Fiscal year 2011 budget; Budget, Federal : Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2009; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Banks and financial institutions :: Financial Crisis Responsibility Fee, proposed; Business and industry : Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Congress : Bipartisanship; Czech Republic : President Obama's visit; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Improvement ; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability ; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Postsecondary education :: Pell grants; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, annual repayment cap; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : Postsecondary education :: Tuition and student loan assistance, public service in exchange for; Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Domestic sources; Energy : National energy policy; Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act

of 2009; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Information technology; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Housing : Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009 ; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Legislation, proposed : "Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2009"; Maine : President's visit; Massachusetts : Democratic Party events; Massachusetts : Energy, alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Massachusetts : Flooding; Massachusetts : Governor; Massachusetts : Lieutenant Governor; Massachusetts : President's visits; Rhode Island : Flooding; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., proposed expansion; Taxation : Tax relief; Treasury, Department of the : Troubled Asset Relief Program.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000226.